

7 Radical Principles for Strategic Planning

 bradhobbs.net/7-radical-principles-for-strategic-planning/

Something strange happens this time of year.

All over the world organizations and individuals are giving thought to their future, and future plans are being made. Many of these are labeled ‘Strategic Plans’. They are pontificated, debated, created, validated, edited, and circulated. And then this is where the strange part comes in.

They are filed.

It’s not unlike cooking a large feast and then putting it in the refrigerator for six months. Not only does it lose its freshness, it can actually stink up the whole kitchen!

I’m not being cynical when I suggest this is the fate of most strategic plans, whether they are created in the public or private sector, for profit or not-for-profit, large and small organizations alike. Even personal plans for that matter – think new years resolutions.

There are likely more strategic plans in the file than on the calendar, and in the Dropbox than the inbox.

Yet the idea of a strategic plan is tremendously important. To give thought to a desired future and how to press toward it in the months and years ahead is smart business. Too many managers appreciate it’s value in theory, but merely offer it a sacramental nod in practice.

If you can relate to this in any way, as I know I can, I’d offer a few edits to your thinking to help arrive at your next planning process with fresh new eyes. Here are seven principles for radically altering your strategic planning.

It’s Not About the Plan but the Planning

I believe the best plans are never more than a couple of pages in length. More important than the deliverable is the process you’ll go through in arriving at that deliverable. Looking strategically at core aspects of your business allows you to ask questions, and then to find answers, that teach you things you either did not know or had perhaps forgotten about your business. It’s the process, not the document, that lays the foundation for your future.

Planning is Learning

That’s really what’s going on in a planning process. Learning about yourself, your organization, your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) and what needs to change. This is essential learning that requires a great deal of honesty and humility that can be difficult to come by. Planning is a time to learn, not grandstand your brilliance.

All Great Plans Have Two Sides

At least if they are to be effective. There is the strategic side – the 5 and 3 year objectives along with the 1 year goals. Then there is the productive or “getting things done” side. In other words, the plan must indicate where you are going but also how you plan to get there. First start with the destination in mind, create a map, then a route. An effective plan should lead you to what you do first, and then next, and then after that.

Planning is a Team Sport

This is obvious in large organizations and wherever there is a board. Yet even if you are a solopreneur you are wise to bring others into your thought process for challenge, confirmation or collaboration. If you are a business owner now is a good time to bring as many of your managers and key people into your leadership circle. You'll want and need as many advocates of the plan as possible. And people are much more committed to what they have helped to create.

Break It Down to Make It Happen

Here is where most plans rot. They simply do not contain a stepped approach to achieving the plan. If you have a 5 Year Strategic Plan, break it down to what initiatives are most critical over the next year. For that one year plan break it down into 90 day objectives. And those 90 day objective break down into monthly and weekly milestones. From there you can establish small blocks of daily focus to keep moving forward with your plan. That's how you arrive at your future – one faithful step at a time.

The Best of Plans Will Change

I hate to break it to you, but this is true. Your brilliant plan is not the final word on your future. That's not to say it's wrong. It just to say things change. So plans must change in response. If you allow for that (through that learning attitude of yours) your plans will become as strong and agile as an Olympic gymnast.

Planning is a Mindset not a Meeting

Leadership teams must realize their very role as leaders means the work they do is always directed toward the future in some way. Whether that future is tomorrow or next year, they lead by doing with an eye toward what's next. That means planning can't be relegated to simply a periodic exercise. It must be a mindset – the context in which they do what they do. They work with the future in mind. Always.

There are many effective methods for strategic planning. Regardless of how it is done, by adopting these seven principles you stand to alter the nature of your planning and the future it will create.

Then you can celebrate with a large feast that you will actually eat!

Which of these principles do you find most helpful?